DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 321 439 EC 231 559

AUTHOR	Barrows, Patricia L.; And Others
TITLE	A Model for Learning Disability Assessment at the State University.
PUB DATE	89
NOTE	10p.
PUB TYPE	Journal Articles (080) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
JOURNAL CIT	CAPED Journal; p53-60 Fall 1989
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	College Students; Delivery Systems; *Educational Diagnosis; Evaluation Methods; Higher Education; *Learning Disabilities; Models; *Program Implementation; State Universities; *Student Evaluation; Student Participation; Student Personnel Services
IDENTIFIERS	California; *Learning Skills Services

ABSTRACT

Learning Skills Services, a federally funded student support service program, is responsible for learning disability assessment and provision of a continuum of services at Sonoma State University in Northern California. In response to the perceived lack of assessment and procedures standards for identifying learning-disabled students at the state college level, a model for disability assessment was developed and has proven effective over 16 months of use. The model involves administration of a battery of formal and informal tests, appointments with learning skills specialists in the academic area(s) of suspected difficulty, and follow-up conferences. The process requires student cooperation in carrying out directed activities without prompting. Includes 19 references. (Author/JDD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

EC 213559

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Patricia L. Barrows

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

A Model for Learning Disability Assessment at the State University

Patricia L. Barrows, M.A.
Donna J. Luna, M.A.
Deborah Blue Shields, Ph.D.
Sonoma State University
Rohnert Park, California

Abstract

This paper discusses a model for disability assessment at the state university. It describes a comprehensive assessment process developed and utilized by the Learning Disability Specialist of Learning Skills Services at a northern state university. This process includes administration of a battery of formal and informal tests, appointments with learning skills specialists in the academic area(s) of suspected difficulty, and follow-up conferences. The learning disability assessment process is an extension of the continuum model of learning assistance services developed and utilized by Learning Skills Services.

A Model for Learning Disability Assessment at the State University

Assessment of learning disabilities at the postsecondary level is still in its infancy. At the state university, standards of assessment are minimal, at best. The current trend toward increasing numbers of learning disabled students in postsecondary education underscores the need for sound and comprehensive diagnostic programs intended for an adult population. The assessment process used at Learning Skills Services was designed to fill that need.

Learning disability assessment serves multiple functions. Initially, assessment differentiates learning disabled students from those who lack preparation for college course work or have learning difficulties linked to visual or auditory deficits. Second, it can pinpoint cognitive and academic areas of strength and weakness, as well as define the degree of severity of the disability. Additionally, assessment enables the student who is identified as learning disabled to be eligible for support services as outlined by

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This act also specifies that no student may be denied entry to higher education solely because of handicap, including learning disability.

In a recent survey of leading professionals conducted by Bursuck and Epstein (1987), issues of learning disability screening and identification were mentioned by more than 20% of the respondents as ranking high in importance among current research topics, and comprised nearly 8% of the articles found in two leading disability journals. Most articles focus on assessment issues at the primary and secondary levels of education. In addition, many of the articles that address learning disability issues in postsecondary education are concerned primarily with remedial and instructional strategies (Linquist, 1988; Wong, 1987). There appears to be a paucity of literature that addresses learning disability assessment at the postsecondary level. As an increasing number of students with learning disabilities enter postsecondary institutions, adequate testing procedures and appropriate diagnostic criteria will become an increasingly important priority.

Learning Skills Services (LSS) is a Student Support Service Program ("Special Services") funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Its purpose is to provide academic support that leads to completion of a bachelor's degree for students who are either low income, first generation college, or physically or learning disabled. Learning Skills Services is responsible for learning disability assessment. Other services provided range along a continuum from most to least intense levels of support. The most intensive support available includes one-on-one assistance from specialists in reading, writing, study strategies, math, science and communication skills. Less intense services include discipline-based learning skills instruction, study groups for rigorous general education courses, drop-in study labs, and workshops in learning strategies, stress management and self-esteem issues. The continuum model provides a method for offering participants an intensive and extensive range of services to meet the diverse needs of our students.

Learning Skills Services Assessment

The process of assessment through LSS is one in which the student is actively included from the beginning. Because the learning disability assessment waiting list is long and growing daily, student cooperation in carrying out directed activities without prompting has been made part of the screening process. Timely action by the student in the initial stage also indicates seriousness of intent.

Pre-Assessment Procedures. When a student is referred for learning disability testing, the following procedure is initiated:

1. The student registers with the campus Disability Resource Center (DRC) for a pre-screening interview with the disability management advisor to determine need and initial eligibility. At this interview, the student is also given information about support services and accommodations available through DRC.

2. The student hand-carries the completed pre-screening interview form to LSS where her/his name is placed on the learning disability assessment list.

3. The student is given a pre-assessment packet which includes three types of forms. The first form requests a listing of all study labs, workshops and tutorial or other assistance already utilized. Secondly, several duplicate forms are included to be completed by professors of the classes in which the student is experiencing the most difficulty. The forms request basic information, such as student attendance, classroom participation and behavior, and test performance, with additional space for comments by the professor. This information can be particularly important in determining if the student will be considered for disability testing. It also allows the student to designate those professionals or agencies to whom the final test results may be given.

4. The completed packet is returned to LSS by the student and evaluated by the diagnostician and the disability management advisor. A file is created for the student and a testing priority number is assigned. Priority ratings are determined by class status (seniors would have priority over juniors), amount and type of assistance sought, and other special need factors. These priority ratings change as students complete the testing process and others enroll. Therefore, students may call LSS to find out where they are on the list at any given time.

5. When their priority numbers approach the top of the list, students are scheduled for a diagnostic intake interview. This comprehensive interview gathers pertinent personal, educational and medical history, and is the final step in determining whether or not the student will be tested. The testing date may be set at this time, if so indicated.

Testing

When the day of testing arrives, many students are understandably nervous and express anxiety about being tested. Alleviating these fears as much as possible and establishing rapport between the student and the diagnostician is an important first step in the testing process. An effort is made to accommodate the needs of the individual student; the diagnostician may offer the student a snack or suggest a short walk together as a way of relaxation. When the student seems relaxed, as indicated by demeanor and a hand-held stress card, testing begins. The student is encouraged to do her/his

best and is allowed to request breaks as needed. The testing process takes four to six hours and may be spread out over two or more appointments.

Learning Disability Assessment Battery. The learning disability assessment battery used at LSS consists of the following instruments, listed in the order administered. Those instruments by which an asterisk appears are always used. The others are used as ancillary assessment tools to collect additional information, if necessary.

1. *The Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery, Parts I & II (Woodcock and Johnson, 1977) is a standard test used to compare aptitude and achievement discrepancy in order to ascertain the presence of learning disabilities.

2. *The Raven Progressive Matrices Test (RAVEN, 1988) is a nonverbal culture fair test of intelligence which measures IQ assessing the ability to identify abstract patterns.

3. *The Imagery Test is used to determine a student's learning modality. It is a nonstandardized free association test which indicates a visual, kinesthetic or auditory approach to learning.

4. *The Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT, three parts, Jastack, 1984) measures the codes which are needed to learn basic skills of reading, spelling and arithmetic. It is used to verify the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-educational Battery grade equivalent scores.

5. *The Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI, Weinstein, Schulte and Palmer, 1987) is used to measure the student's use of learning and study strategies.

6. The Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised (WAIS-R) is a standard IQ test which is used for verification when a subaverage score is obtained on the RAVEN (test #2, above).

7. The Learning Styles Survey is used to determine learning modality. It is administered if the results on the Imagery Test seem unclear or the student thinks he/she is in error.

8. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) identifies preference in regard to perception and judgment, and is used with:

9. Sixteen Personality (16 PF), a basic personality test. These instruments are used when the need for additional information of psychological content is indicated, such as in a case of suspected malingering.

10. Ross Informational Processing Assessment (RIPA, Ross, 1986) provides a measure of the level of severity of neurological damage. This test is administered if alarmingly low IQ scores on both the RAVEN and the WAIS-R alert the diagnostician to the possibility of problems other than learning disability.

An appointment with a learning skills specialist, who will assess the

student's skills and deficiencies with respect to learning disabilities within her/his area of expertise, is the final step in the testing process. Additional tests, such as the Math Anxiety Rating Scale (MARS) or the Diagnostic Spelling Proficiency Test (DSPT) may be administered at this time. The results of this meeting are forwarded to the diagnostician.

Evaluation

The process of evaluation begins with careful study of the test scores. Since few of these diagnostic tests were designed specifically to identify learning disabilities, considerable care must be taken in interpreting their results. The high achieving student with dyslexic-type problems, for example, may be hard to identify as learning disabled from the test scores. This is also true for the learning disabled student for whom English is a second language.

After careful consideration of relevant information from the intake interview, results on the battery of tests, and the conference with learning skills specialists, a preliminary diagnosis is made by the diagnostician and discussed with the LSS staff. The model of diagnostic assessment used by LSS requires significant intra-cognitive discrepancies or significant aptitude-achievement discrepancies as basic criteria for verification of learning disabilities. This model also permits a provisional learning disability designation for up to 10% of the students tested during the academic year to allow for the student who may not be identified by standard diagnostic procedures, yet who clearly shows classic learning disability deficiencies.

Diagnostic Reports

The final step in assessment is preparation of a formal diagnostic report that provides a brief profile of the student, relevant background information and all test scores obtained, along with a comprehensive discussion and summary. Every effort is made to insure that the report is thorough, yet concise. Following a summary of findings, the report concludes with recommendations for the student, which may include: appropriate accommodations to be coordinated by the Disability Resource Center; one-on-one sessions with learning skills services specialists; workshops and study sessions; special assistance with self-esteem, stress management or personal development issues; training in study skills improvement; and contact with the student Learning Disability Support Group. There are often recommendations that the student seek additional consultations with a behavioral optometrist, audiologist or neurologist.

Conferencing and Follow-up Interviews

When the report is completed, the student is scheduled for a conference with the diagnostician. Together they examine and discuss the report to insure that the student understands both the test results and the recom-

mendations. Student strengths and weaknesses are also addressed. The student receives a copy of the full report and an abbreviated version which excludes individual test results, and may request additional copies, as needed. Students who are hesitant to identify themselves to a professor as learning disabled will sometimes feel more comfortable when using this report for that purpose.

Student contact with the diagnostician does not end with this meeting. Often, close rapport has been developed between the two and students are encouraged to return to talk over issues pertaining to learning disabilities or any other concerns they may have.

After three to four months have passed, the student is scheduled for a follow-up interview. These meetings are usually light-hearted and pleasant for both participants, but also serve the important function of checking in with the student to assess academic progress, use of services, and future needs for assistance. Additional recommendations may be made at this time.

Conclusion

The comprehensive assessment program described in this article was developed in response to the perceived lack of assessment and procedures standards in identifying learning disabled students at the state college level and has proven effective over 16 months of use. The assessment procedure is continually being examined and refined. It is seen as a starting point for ideas concerning learning disability assessment and is offered as a catalyst for future study and discussion. Your questions and comments are welcome.

References

Bursuck, W.D., & Epstein, M.H. (1987). Current research topics in learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Quarterly, 10*(11), 2-7.

Hoy, C., & Gregg, N. (1986). The usefulness of the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-educational Battery cognitive cluster scores for learning disabled college students. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 19,* 489-491.

Imagery Test. (no date). Santa Rosa, California: Santa Rosa Junior College.

Jastak, S., & Wilkinson, G.S. (1984). *Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT)* (rev. ed). Wilmington, Delaware: Jastak Associates.

Knowles, B.S., & Knowles, P.S. (1983). A model for identifying learning disabilities in college bound students. *Journal of learning disabilities, 16,* 39-42.

Lazarus, B.D. (1989). Serving learning disabled students in post-secondary settings. *Journal of Developmental Education, 12*(3), 2-4, 6.

Linquist, A.J. (1988). Remediating language deficient/dyslexic college students: an interview with Robert Nash. *Journal of Developmental Education, 12*(1), 16-19.

Myers Briggs, I. (1980). *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MABTI)* (3rd ed.). Palo Alto, California: Consulting Psychologist Press.

Newill, B.H., Goyette, C.H., & Fogarty, T.W. (1984). Diagnosis and assessment of the adult with specific learning disabilities. *Journal of Rehabilitation, 50*, 34-39.

Project success: meeting the diverse needs of learning disabled adults. (no date). Dallas, Texas: Richland College.

Public Law No. 93-112. The rehabilitation act of 1973. *Federal Register,* (July 27, 1973).

Raven, J.C. (1958). *Raven Progressive Matrices Test (RAVEN)* (rev. 1985). New York: Psychological Corporation.

Ross, D.G. (1986). *Ross Informational Processing Assessment (RIPA).* Austin, Texas: Pro-Ed.

Vogel, S.A. (1982). On developing LD college programs. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 15,* 518-528.

Weinstein, C.E., Schulte, A.C., & Palmer, D.R. (1987). *Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI).* Clearwater, Florida: H & H Publishing.

Weller, C., & Strawser, S. (1980). Detecting learning disabilities in the college-aged student. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 3,* 87-89.

Wong, B. (1987). How do the results of metacognitive research impact on the learning disabled individual? *Learning Disability Quarterly, 10,* 189-195.

Woodcock, R.W., & Johnson, M.B. (1977). *Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery, Parts I & II.* Allen, Texas: DLM.

Wren, C., & Segal, L. (1985). *College students with learning disabilities: a student's perspective.* Chicago, Illinois: DePaul University.

Personal Summaries

Patricia L. Barrows is a recent (January 1989) graduate of Sonoma State University, with an M.A. in psychology. Her undergraduate studies were also completed at Sonoma State University. She is presently filling a pre-professional placement with Learning Skills Services and hopes to continue to work with learning disabled students at the postsecondary level in the future. Patricia's deepest interests in the field are in the areas of self-esteem and personal growth issues, and biofeedback applications for the learning disabled.

Donna J. Luna, M.A., is the Learning Disabilities Specialist for Learning Skills Services and the Disability Resource Center at Sonoma State University. She holds a master's degree in psychology from Pepperdine University and is currently looking at doctorate programs in the area. Donna created and developed the Learning Disability Assessment Battery and Pre-assessment Packet, and Diagnostic Intake Screening currently in use at Sonoma State University. Her current interest is to initiate a study comparing learning disabilities with levels of androgyny.

Deborah Blue Shields completed her Ph.D. at the University of Ilinois, Champaign-Urbana, in speech and hearing science with an emphasis in language. For the past 15 years Dr. Shields has worked with students with learning disabilities as a public school therapist and as a private practitioner consulting with special schools. She was a special education program manager for the Sonoma County Office of Education in Santa Rosa, Calif. She has served on the faculty at Michigan State University, Holy Names College in Oakland, Calif., and the University of San Francisco. Deborah is presently Director of Learning Skills Services at Sonoma State University where she also teaches the teacher credential mainstreaming course in the School of Education.